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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION: TRANSPORT OF DANGEROUS GOODS

Work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 645 G (XXIII) of 26 April 1957, the Secretary-General reports biennially to the Council on the work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods. In the present report, the Secretary-General brings to the attention of the Council the work done by the Committee and its subsidiary body during the biennium 1989-1990.

The Committee welcomed the participation of India as a full member. Observers for Nigeria and Panama participated for the first time and the Government of Portugal has applied for membership.

The Committee requested that its new and amended recommendations be published in all the official languages of the United Nations not later than the end of 1991. The Committee once again stressed the need for increased staff resources. The Committee approved a draft resolution on its work for adoption by the Council.

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I. MATTERS REQUIRING ACTION BY THE COUNCIL

1. The Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods recommends to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods

The Economic and Social Council,

Recalling its resolutions 1983/7 of 26 May 1983, 1985/9 of 28 May 1985, 1986/66 of 23 July 1986, 1987/54 of 28 May 1987 and 1989/104 of 27 July 1989,

Noting the ever-increasing volume of dangerous goods in world-wide commerce and the rapid expansion of technology and innovation,

Bearing in mind the continuing need to meet the growing concern for the protection of life, property and the environment through the safe transport of dangerous goods while facilitating trade,

Aware that, in order to achieve internationally harmonized laws, the specialized agencies and other international organizations and interested Member States are committed to taking the recommendations of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods as a basis for the formulation of their requirements and regulations and therefore rely on the work of the Committee,

Recognizing the increasing need for cooperation with other international bodies, such as the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization and the European Economic Community, involved in activities related to the transport of dangerous goods,

Reaffirming the desirability of widening the decision-making base of the Committee by encouraging the participation of developing countries and other non-member countries in its future work,

1. Takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods during the biennium 1989-1990 1/ and of the new and amended recommendations approved by the Committee for inclusion in its existing recommendations; 2/

1/ E/1991/68.

2/ See ST/SG/AC.10/17 and Add.1-6.

2. Requests the Secretary-General:

(a) To incorporate in the existing recommendations of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods all the new and amended recommendations approved by the Committee at its sixteenth session;

(b) To publish the new and amended recommendations in all the official languages of the United Nations, in the most cost-effective manner, not later than the end of 1991;

(c) To circulate the new and amended recommendations immediately after their publication to the Governments of Member States, the specialized agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the other international organizations concerned;

3. Invites all Governments, the specialized agencies, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the other international organizations concerned to transmit to the Secretary-General their views on the Committee's work, together with any comments they may wish to make on the amended recommendations;

4. Invites all interested Governments and the international organizations concerned, when developing appropriate codes and regulations, to take full account of the recommendations of the Committee;

5. Recommends again that adequate funding be provided to support the work of the Committee as indicated in the report of the Committee on its sixteenth session, if possible by setting up a special fund;

6. Reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to make available, within existing resources, the staff necessary for the adequate servicing of the Committee, namely one additional Professional and one additional General Service post, and regrets that the requests made in its resolutions 1983/7, 1985/9, 1986/66, 1987/54 and 1989/104 have not yet been met;

7. Requests the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Council in 1993 on the implementation of the present resolution.

II. GENERAL ASPECTS OF THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

2. Transport of dangerous goods is regulated in order to prevent, as far as is possible, accidents to persons or property and damage to the means of transport employed or to other goods. At the same time, regulations must be framed so as not to impede the movement of such goods, other than those too dangerous to be accepted for transport. With that exception, the aim of regulations is to make transport feasible by eliminating risks or reducing them to a minimum. It is a matter of safety no less than of facilitating transport.

3. The Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and its subsidiary bodies are developing recommendations in the light of technical progress, the advent of new substances and materials, the exigencies of modern transport systems and, above all, the requirement to ensure the safety of people, property and the environment. The recommendations are addressed to Governments and international organizations concerned with regulating the transport of dangerous goods. They cover principles of classification and definition of classes, listing of the principal dangerous goods, general packing requirements, testing procedures, marking, labelling or placarding, and shipping documents. In addition, there are special recommendations related to particular classes of goods. Nevertheless, they do not apply to dangerous goods in bulk, which in most countries, are subject to special regulations.

4. After 30 years, the main thrust of the Committee is changing. For the first two decades, the Committee was preoccupied with elaborating technical recommendations and persuading the regulatory authorities to take cognizance of them. During the past decade, the United Nations recommendations have become the acknowledged source of technical provisions. The Committee's role is now twofold: to adapt the recommendations to technological progress, so that they remain relevant and practical; and to respond to suggestions from the modal authorities for amending the recommendations to promote total harmonization.

5. The Committee performs those functions in a sensitive context, in which pressure is growing to control the risks to the public and the environment that are associated with dangerous substances. The Committee is competent and well structured to make recommendations that strike a sensible balance between undue risks, on the one hand, and unwarranted restrictions on trade, on the other.

6. The Committee's work obviously benefits countries involved in extensive international transport of dangerous goods. Increasingly, those benefits also apply to developing countries as they build up and increase their industrial potential and find it necessary to create or further develop their legislation and technical regulations. The Committee is open to all who have an interest in and are confronted with the transport of dangerous goods.

III. WORK OF THE COMMITTEE DURING THE BIENNIUM 1989-1990

7. The Committee held its sixteenth session at Geneva from 3 to 12 December 1990.

8. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/104, the Government of India participated in the work of the Committee as a full member. The Governments of Nigeria and Panama were represented by observers for the first time, and the Government of Portugal has formally requested full membership. The Committee welcomed the participation of those countries as a further step towards widening the geographical scope of its decision-making

base. There were 99 participants at the sixteenth session, representing 14 Member States, 8 States having observer status, and 20 specialized agencies and governmental and non-governmental organizations.

9. Liaison was maintained with the regulatory authorities responsible for individual modes of transport, namely the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Central Office of International Railway Transport (OCTI).

10. The Committee paid special attention to coordination of its own activities with those of other international organizations whose activities impinge on the field of transport of dangerous goods. Liaison was established with the secretariats responsible for the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (United Nations Environment Programme), the International Programme on Chemical Safety (World Health Organization) and the Convention on Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work (International Labour Organisation) to ensure that their work would complement, rather than duplicate or clash with, existing agreements and instruments on safe transport of dangerous goods.

11. During the biennium 1989-1990 the Committee completed its work on a new classification regime for gases and a radically new scheme for classifying self-reactive substances. It also made amendments to its recommendations on infectious substances.

12. As regards infectious substances, in particular genetically modified organisms, the Committee expressed the view that a significant effort should be made to harmonize its work with the work of the Commission of the European Communities, which could proceed with its own measures, as necessary, for the protection of workers. It was noted that the Transport Directorate of the European Economic Community took into account the United Nations recommendations on the transport of dangerous goods. 3/

A. Restructuring of the Committee's subsidiary bodies

13. In accordance with the Committee's previous recommendation to the Economic and Social Council, its two subsidiary bodies were combined to form the Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods. It meets once or twice a year, alternately, and prepares recommendations for endorsement by the Committee. More specifically it:

(a) Recommends and defines groupings or classifications of dangerous goods on the basis of the character of risk involved;

3/ Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, sixth revised edition (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.89.VIII.1).

(b) Lists the principal dangerous goods moving in commerce and assigns each to its proper grouping or classification;

(c) Recommends marks or labels for each group or class to identify the risk graphically and without recourse to printed text;

(d) Recommends the simplest possible requirements for shipping papers covering dangerous goods;

(e) Recommends the minimum requirements for safe packing of various types of goods, having regard to technological developments in packing materials.

B. Meetings held during the biennium 1989-1990

14. Since the first regular session of 1989 of the Economic and Social Council, the following meetings have been held (the symbol in parentheses is that of the report of the Subcommittee or Committee concerned):

(a) Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods: first session, 31 July-11 August 1989 (ST/SG/AC.10/C.3/2); second session, 15-26 January 1990 (ST/SG/AC.10/C.3/4); third session, 2-13 July 1990 (ST/SG/AC.10/C.3/6);

(b) Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods: sixteenth session, 3-12 December 1990 (ST/SG/AC.10/17 and addenda).

C. Publication of the recommendations

15. The seventh edition of the Recommendations will be completed at the end of May 1991.

16. The recommendations should in future be issued by electronic means; the text will be stored on electronic supports and delivered to members that request it. At the same time, the secretariat will study the possibility of creating a data bank on dangerous goods.

17. The Committee welcomed the intention to publish the new and amended recommendations in the most cost-effective manner, not later than the end of 1991.

D. Resources

18. The Committee regretted that the request for additional staff to support its activities (see Economic and Social Council resolutions 1981/3, 1983/7, 1985/7, 1985/9, 1986/66, 1987/54 and 1989/104) had not yet been implemented.

19. The Inland Transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe, at its fifty-third session (28 January-1 February 1991), heard a statement by the Executive Secretary, in which he announced his commitment to obtaining additional staff for the Transport Division, including two additional posts for the transport of dangerous goods.

E. Future work

20. The Committee agreed on the programme of work for its subsidiary body during 1991-1992 in the following areas:

(a) Matters concerning Class 1;

(b) Review of chapters 9 and 16, including:

(i) Metal drum reprocessing;

(ii) Testing/quality assurance of leak-proof materials;

(iii) Compatibility testing;

(iv) Solid/liquid definition;

(v) Certain IBCs - Packing Group I;

(vi) Vibration test;

(vii) Stack test;

(c) Review of chapter 13;

(d) Classes of goods and wastes having dangerous properties not covered by existing classification;

(e) Review of Class 8;

(f) Classification of flammable liquids;

(g) Amendments to N.O.S. 4/ entries;

(h) Multi-modal tank tables;

(i) Excepted/limited quantities;

(j) Harmonization with IMO;

4/ Denotes "not otherwise specified".

(k) Lithium batteries;

(l) Test methods for Division 5.1;

(m) Routine listing and classification;

(n) Liaison with other international bodies;

(o) Presentation of the recommendations;

(p) Other business.

F. Calendar of meetings for the biennium 1991-1992

21. The Committee proposed that its seventeenth session be held from 7 to 16 December 1992. In the interim, the Subcommittee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods should meet three times: 1-12 July 1991, 2-13 December 1991 and 6-17 July 1992.

G. Draft resolution on the work of the Committee

22. The Committee approved a draft resolution (ST/SG/AC.10/17/Add.1) entitled "Work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods" for adoption by the Economic and Social Council (for the text, see para. 1 above).